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PRESIDENT VISITS V CORPS UNITS IN GERMANY, SAYS THANKS FOR 'JOB WELL DONE' IN IRAQ

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WIESBADEN ARMY AIRFIELD, Germany -- "Today I bring you a message from back home: The American people are grateful to you; your communities are proud of you. And as you defend the cause of freedom, America stands with you," U.S. President George W. Bush told about 3,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen and their families here February 23.



BILL ROCHE

President George W. Bush addresses about 3,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen and their family members during a visit to Wiesbaden (Germany) Army Airfield February 23. The president thanked the service members and families for their duty and sacrifice during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The commander in chief's stop here was part of a three-day series of meeting with NATO officials and European leaders. Before arriving on the airfield, the president met with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in Mainz, Germany.

"I arrived this morning from Brussels, where I was meeting with some of our vital allies in the war on terror," Bush said. "I came to Wiesbaden to meet

you, the men and women fighting on the front lines of that war. You are carrying out challenging duties with skill and honor."

Bush also praised family members for their service and sacrifice.

"Your president is here to tell you that I am proud of the military families as well," he said.

V Corps' 1st Armored Division and 1st Infantry Division have played important roles in the defense of freedom through history, the president said. The divisions were on the front lines during World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam and Operations Desert Shield and Storm.

"The 1st Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions are two of the oldest, proudest units in the United States Army," he said. "And on this day 14 years ago, soldiers in both your divisions spent their final night in Saudi Arabia, before charging into Iraq to crush the army of Saddam Hussein."

When called, the 1st Armored Division "moved into Iraq in April of 2003, and you stayed for 15 months. You waged an innovative, disciplined campaign, and because of your skill and sacrifice, Iraq is sovereign and Iraq is free," he said.

The Iraqi people struggled under a regime that crippled the country and oppressed its citizens, Bush said. Soldiers of the "Old Ironsides" division repaired schools and helped to rebuild the country's infrastructure as well.

"When the Iron Soldiers left for Iraq, Saddam Hussein was sitting in a palace. And by the time you came home, he was sitting in a prison cell," Bush said to resounding cheers.

Bush said 1st Armored Division Soldiers served honorably and with determination and continued to accomplish their missions even when the division's return home was postponed by three months. Soldiers took on and defeated insurgent militias in Karbala, Najaf, Al Kut and Diwaniyah.

Those battles helped pave the way toward Iraq's sovereignty, he said.

Soldiers from the 1st Infantry Division carried on with the work begun by the 1st Armored Division, Bush added.

"From Kirkuk to Samarra to Tikrit, the soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division worked around the clock to prepare Iraq for free elections," he said. "More than 8 million Iraqi voters defied the terrorists by lining up at the polls, dipping their fingers in ink, and casting the first free vote of their lives."

"Job well done," Bush said. "By helping the people of that country turn back the enemies of democracy, you have acted in the great liberating tradition of our nation. Together, the 1st Infantry Division and the 1st Armored Division have helped to bring freedom and hope to a suffering people."

The president also cited the courage, determination and skills of two other V Corps units in Wiesbaden -- the 3rd Corps Support Command and the 421st Medical Battalion (Evacuation).

He also remembered service members who gave their lives and who suffered wounds while defending freedom and liberating people of other nations.

"Some in your units have survived terrible injuries, and a grateful America will do everything we can to help them recover," the president pledged. "Some of you have said farewell to some fine Americans. They represent a new generation of heroes, as great as any who have come before. Their example of unselfish courage inspires all who serve.

"And America will honor their names forever."

Soldiers and their families have made contributions to the country and the world that last for many years, he said. By taking the fight to the enemy, service members are ensuring that the war on terrorism does not spread to the United States. It is also helping to reshape the Middle East.

"By helping captive peoples gain their freedom, you have made a critical contribution to the history of liberty," Bush said. "And that means the world will be more peaceful, and our children and grandchildren will be more secure. With your courage, with your determination, and with your skill, the cause of freedom will prevail, and we'll achieve the peace that we all want for future generations to come."

